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Finding Your Motivation to Quit Tobacco

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Since I've quit tobacco, my PRT run times are better and, overall, I just feel better.

Quitting tobacco is hard, but it's not impossible. Anyone can do it.

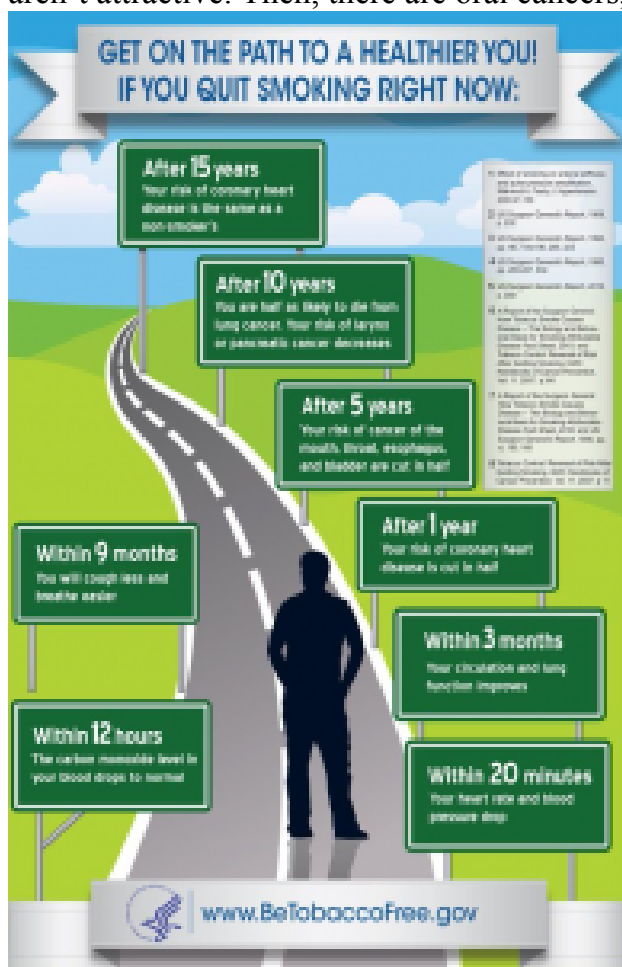
The first step is making a personal choice and finding your reason for quitting, because no matter how

many medications or nicotine replacement therapies you try, you have to really want to quit to make it happen and stick with it. I know, because I'm a former tobacco user—I smoked and I chewed.

Finding a reason to quit is really a personal decision. There are plenty of reasons, but we're all different people with our own motivations. The important thing is to find a reason that matters to you.

Maybe you should quit for the obvious reason—your health. We all know that tobacco use is bad for you, but do you really know how bad? Anytime you're smoking a cigar or cigarette, inhaling that nicotine is going to pick you up a little bit, but it's also going to cause your blood pressure to go up and damage your blood vessels, increasing your risk of heart disease and stroke. Smoking also destroys your lungs and makes you more susceptible to upper respiratory infections. And don't forget that smoking increases your risk of respiratory cancers and other cancers as well.

If you chew, you'll be destroying your gums and teeth. Receding gum lines, gingivitis, and stained teeth aren't attractive. Then, there are oral cancers, throat cancers, all



...kinds of things that can go wrong. And, no matter what form of tobacco you use, cigarettes or smokeless, eventually you could develop erectile dysfunction.

Every time you light up or put a dip in your mouth, you're poisoning yourself because nicotine is filled with all kinds of contaminants. Things you wouldn't knowingly put into your body like formaldehyde and arsenic.

But, I get it. When you're young, you may not care so much about quitting for health reasons. I know I didn't. We all think we're invincible when we're young. We know about all the side effects, and we still do it because we think nothing bad is going to happen.

If health reasons don't make you want to quit, what about your physical performance? Smoking, because

of its effect on your body impacts your fitness. The damage that smoking does to your lungs makes them move oxygen less efficiently, which means you aren't going to be at your peak physical performance. If you're an active duty Sailor or Marine, that could mean you aren't able to score as well on your physical readiness test (PRT). Personally, since I've quit tobacco, my PRT run times are better and, overall, I just feel better.

What about your finances? Smoking and dip cost money. And they're getting more and more expensive each year. How much do you spend on your tobacco habit? I'm sure you could find better things to spend your money on.

Whatever the reason, find one. To truly be successful at quitting tobacco, it has to matter to you. For me, it was my family. I recall mowing the lawn one day when my oldest child was small. He was going behind me with his toy lawn mower. I had some dip in my mouth because I was chewing all the time then, and I noticed that when I spit, he would too. I thought to myself, "no." I didn't want my son to grow up thinking this nasty habit was okay.

I know it can be especially hard to quit when you're in the military because it's been part of the culture for a long time. I started smoking in my 20s, after I joined the Navy. I was more of a casual smoker then, but when I was out to sea, I definitely smoked more. The only time you really got a break back then was to head to the smoke deck, which led to my dipping/chewing all the time.

I also know that even after you quit, you can relapse. I'd chewed off and on since I was a teenager and I would quit for years at a time. I had quit for my family in my late 20s, but I started again when I went to physician assistant (PA) school. I was stressed and tired. There's a comfort to just putting in a dip, having the nicotine go to work and you're calm.



After PA school, I went with the Marines and chewing tobacco is rampant, making it hard to quit. Being a battalion surgeon, running a Battalion Aid Station (BAS), managing 63 corpsmen, and dealing with leadership was stressful. That can make you fall back onto your crutch, like using tobacco. And then, when you're constantly surrounded by tobacco, it can be that much harder to quit.

But I did quit. When I came back from my second deployment, I decided that I was done with tobacco. For me, quitting smoking wasn't hard, but chewing tobacco was a different story. You get that oral fixation, the need or habit of having something in your mouth. Not having that comfort was probably the most difficult thing. But there are many benefits to quitting—I don't have to pay for it anymore, I don't have nasty, dirty dip bottles laying around, and I don't feel like an addict when I'm somewhere that you can't chew and you start feeling like you've got to have it. Because make no mistake, nicotine is a drug and it's very addicting. You develop a mental and physiological dependency on it.

I've been tobacco-free for over two years now and I have no desire, no temptation, to ever use it again. Anyone can quit, you just need to find your motivation and prepare for it.

For anyone looking to quit, I'd like to offer the following advice:

- Protect your environment—if you're with a group of friends who start smoking or put in a dip, walk away.
- Plan ahead—bring celery sticks, sugar-free candies or gum, or fruit to put in your mouth if you're a chewer.
- Carry a pencil to twirl around, something to do with your hands and fingers if you were a smoker.
- Commit to it—the decision to quit is lifelong.
- Make the decision, get your family and friends to support you, and do it.
- Talk to your doc—they can help you come up with a treatment plan and prescribe a nicotine replacement therapy that's right for you.
- Find a tobacco cessation program—there are programs just about everywhere you go in the Navy and Marine Corps and your health care provider should be able to point you in the right direction.

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